

## ***Geographic Area Forecast***

**Northern Rockies:** Normal significant wildland fire potential is expected for the Northern Rockies Geographic Area for the Outlook period. Persistent warm and dry ridge events were quickly followed by abrupt shifts into cooler and wetter patterns in April. The alternating pattern proved beneficial for moisture east of the Continental Divide where, on average, precipitation amounts were above normal for the month. Across Western Montana and Northern Idaho, monthly precipitation amounts were generally less than normal. The overall warmer-than-average conditions allowed snowpack melt to begin a little ahead of normal. Drought signals continued to be observed along the Front Range, portions of south central Montana, and across most of North Dakota.

Expect generally warmer and drier than average conditions through mid-April that transition to average or even slightly wetter than average conditions from mid-spring into early summer. The first half of May will likely feature overall cooler and wetter than average conditions under the influence of a series of passing upper level troughs and low pressure areas. Two other potential transitions in the weather are likely throughout the period. The first of the two is expected in late May as the Area transitions to a convectively active southwesterly flow. By mid-July conditions will transition to a hot and dry ridge pattern. Greenup is currently occurring across the northern Rockies. Full green-up should occur by late May and early June in most areas followed by the curing and drying process of the live fuels from mid-June through July. The Northern Rockies is currently exiting the pre-green-up grassfire season east of the Continental Divide and largely remains out of season west of the Divide. Portions of the Area will begin fire season in late June as the grasses and other live fuels dry out across southeastern Montana and southwestern North Dakota. From there, a typical, gradual transition of the activity's focus will shift from these areas to western Montana and northern Idaho by mid-July.

## **DNRC Fire Season Preparations**

By June 30, DNRC personnel will have trained approximately 3,000 personnel from local, State, and federal fire agencies in more than 100 training courses.

Seasonal employee hiring is nearly complete, and the majority of seasonal personnel will report to work by May 23<sup>rd</sup>. Some seasonal personnel and all career seasonal personnel have already reported to work.

Fire personnel are conducting both Fireline Safety Refresher training for and Work Capacity Tests for permanent and career seasonal personnel, and will continue to do so through early June.

We have completed pre-season maintenance and readiness inspections of all 85 engines in our direct protection units and will complete pre-season maintenance and readiness inspections on the 278 engines in our county cooperative areas by the end of June.

By mid-May we will train approximately 80 members of the Montana Army National Guard and will complete certification of National Guard pilots who fly fire missions.

Our Equipment Development and Communications Center (EDCC) will develop twenty four (24) 500 gallon initial attack engines for placement in both our direct protection units and County Coop areas.

All five of our MT-205 helicopters will be available for fire duty by this Friday, with all 10 of our aircraft (seven helicopters and three fixed-wing) ready for fire duty by May 13<sup>th</sup>.